



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

WEEK 26

ISAIAH

JUNE 25-29, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	Isaiah 19-24, Psalm 126	Isaiah 1:1 & 6:1-13, Psalm 126
Tuesday	Isaiah 25-30, Psalm 127	Isaiah 11:1-9, Psalm 127
Wednesday	Isaiah 31-36, Psalm 128	Isaiah 40:1-11, Psalm 128
Thursday	Isaiah 37-42, Psalm 129	Isaiah 62:1-9, Psalm 129
Friday	Isaiah 43-48, Psalm 130	Is 9:1-7; 52:4-7; 53:3-6, Ps 130

READ

Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1-13

Psalms 126

REFLECT

Isaiah was prophet in Israel during some of the most traumatic episodes of the history of Israel. Active at least between 740 and 701 BC and perhaps longer, he prophesied and then witnessed the carrying of the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity and oblivion. That left the northern border of Judah, always protected by their cousins of Israel, exposed to the rising power and wrath of the Assyrian Empire. He also discerned the real threat of Judah's final deportation by Babylon.

The details of Isaiah's life that we have come to us against the background of these events. The son of Amoz (not the prophet Amos), Isaiah seems to have been from a well-connected family of Jerusalem; he was possibly the cousin of King Uzziah, in the last years of whose reign he began to prophesy. He was married to a prophetess, and they had two sons (Isaiah 7:3; 8:3). The tremendous range of his literary ability suggests a full education, and his readiness to address different people groups in Jerusalem – the priests, the prophets, the royal family – also points to his familiarity with the life of the capital city. The dramatic story of the arrival of the Assyrian king Sennacherib and Hezekiah's turn to Isaiah for intercession before God is told in 2 Kings 18-20, as is Isaiah's horror that Hezekiah has shown off the gold of Judah to the emissaries of Babylon. So Isaiah's insights regarding local, national, and international affairs came from first-hand experiences. Though the Bible does not describe his death, there is a Jewish tradition that he was killed by Manasseh, Hezekiah's successor, sawn in two by a wooden saw (see also Hebrews 11:37). Thus there is strong reason to remember him as a martyr to his faith.

These details of his life do not at all prepare us for the astonishing power and influence of his prophecies. We might measure it by the number of "favorite passages" found in Isaiah (just read the book and see!), or that the NT quotes Isaiah more than any other OT book except for the Psalms. Jesus found in Isaiah 61 the programmatic explanation of His own ministry (Luke 4:18). Whole passages remain familiar through the Church's free use of this book (for instance in Handel's *Messiah*: "For unto us a child is *born*.... And His *name* shall be *called*. Wonderful!").

There is an important discussion about how much of the present book of Isaiah was actually authored by the eight-century prophet. For about 100 years a school of scholars has suggested that chapters 40-66 must have come from a later time, for three reasons: there are differences in style; the historical references seem to relate to a later period; and the grasp of God in His glory seems to have undergone significant development. Many, in fact, will separate chapters 56-66 into a third section, and call these "First, Second, and Third Isaiah." More lately there is something of a return to seeing the unity of the book, valuing the "foretelling" aspect of prophecy, and accepting the development of the prophet himself in the course of his ministry. Certainly no one in the biblical era (including Jesus) knew of any other person to name as author of these passages. So here we assume that Isaiah was basically behind the whole book.

RESPOND

The power of God's word has produced martyrs in every generation. Our word "martyr" comes from the Greek word "witness," and this reminds us that dying for the sake of the Gospel is certainly not the only way to stand firmly for the truth of God's love. To stand for what is true and right can be very uncomfortable, but surely we can be confident of the Lord's presence and support as we witness to Him. "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joyful shouting" (Psalm 126:5).

PRAY

Lord, Thank You for the strength of Your word as it is becoming the anchor of my life. Help me share that strength with others today.

- D.D.

READ

Isaiah 11:1-9

Psalm 127

REFLECT

The prophecy in today's passage speaks of a time in which a godly leader will arise in Judah ("Jesse" being a reference to the father of David). He will come from the line of David, and moreover will be anointed by the Spirit of God. He will have the two-fold discernment necessary for effective leadership: attunement with the Lord, and attunement with justice. The result will be an unprecedented peace – that is, an unprecedented *sort* of peace. Implacable enemies will no longer feel their enmity, so that both within the nation and in fact throughout the world, the dynamic of strife and war will be replaced by the dynamic of service to the Lord.

It is worth looking closely at some of the language that Isaiah uses here, which is also language that he returns to throughout his book of prophecy. More than any other book except the Psalms, Isaiah lifts up the idea of righteousness as a necessary and beautiful component in obedient spirituality. Certainly no Christian would disagree with him on this. The question is, however, do we understand what he means by righteousness? As we have suggested before, it is easy for 21st century Christians to "hear" a sort of truncated version of righteousness when something broader is intended. We tend to think of it as an internal or very personal measure of obedience; as God is holy in Himself, so we too need to be growing in personal holiness. Well, this is certainly very true. But "righteousness" in the Bible alludes to more than mere personal obedience, but also how we are faithful to the larger call and kingdom of God. God is righteous, for OT writers, because He is willing and able to fulfill His promises to us: His righteousness is not just a personal attribute, but a saving attribute: it rescues us. (Look at Psalm 36:10.) The point for our passage is this: the ruler who judges in righteousness will *benefit* each member of society. And we who live righteously toward God are those who are living out His love and care

toward *all we come in contact with*. It is vertical, but biblically it is also always horizontal.

Isaiah also speaks in this passage of the "knowledge" of God. The "shoot of Jesse" is gifted with knowledge of God from above, a knowledge characterized not by familiarity but by awe ("fear"), a knowledge that can be the heart of all our delight (11:2-3). But not only will this leader have an instinctive and intimate insight into God's will: all may share in it – "For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (11:9). Knowledge in this context is something much deeper than a factual knowledge or even a cultivated expertise. The French distinguish between "*savoir*" and "*connaître*," between factual knowledge and instinctive, personal knowledge. Clearly Isaiah is envisioning a wonderful promise of widespread, instinctive knowledge of God given as a gift by God, even as the son of Jesse is given knowledge by means of the outpoured Spirit. The gift of knowledge itself will be the medium through which all the good things of God can and will take hold in human society. But this knowledge will never be separable from actual relationship with God. And so really it will be the very presence of God to human society that will make the difference. God Himself will recreate human society itself as something humane.

RESPOND

As Christians we hear the promise of outpoured knowledge in the Spirit as something that has been fulfilled in Christ in the Church. Yes? I agree. But if so, what opportunities await us daily to help bring our world more and more into conformity with Isaiah's vision. Do we resist the temptations of enmity? Do we help cultivate fairness and righteousness? Do we seek deeper knowledge of our God and foster it among those we love? "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). God helping us, *we do*.

PRAY

Lord, Thank You so much for the precious gift of knowing You in Your Son Jesus Christ. Help me be open to the ways in which that knowledge can lead me in fresh obedience today.

- D.D.

READ

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 128

REFLECT

Today's passage leads off the great second section of Isaiah, as the prophet turns from the warnings of God's wrath to the promise of God's redemption. It is an effective introduction to the promises to come: once the sins of Judah have received appropriate punishment, the restoring blessings of God will flow. (The idea of receiving "double for all her sins," 40:2, is better translated as having received "the twin" or "the equal match" of all her sins.)

These eleven verses are astonishingly rich. As we read through it, we are inevitably reminded of the many and effective ways that we have heard these passages proclaimed. They carry their own evocative power. We hear the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3), and that of Jesus (40:11). We hear of the power of the written and the preached Word (40:7). But there are two things that we might not hear, that are important for understanding this passage. The first is the power of verse 1, in its reversal of the main burden of chapters 1-39, and indeed of the burden of all of the prophets this far. The passage, and the rest of Isaiah, stands under the powerful and reiterated proclamation of "Comfort!" God in His deep love of Judah does not rejoice in chastisements, but rather in the many and wonderful ways He can and will bring His blessings to them.

The second thing to note is the promise that "the glory of the Lord will be revealed." The theme of God's glory is an important one for Isaiah, so that it might be said that he is the OT theologian of the glory of God. I'm not sure that theology ever gets any deeper or higher than it does in Isaiah; even in the NT. If so, much of this profundity is expressed in the idea of "glory." "Glory" (Heb: kabod) is a word that has several uses in the OT. Its basic meaning seems to be "weight," referring to the mass of an army (2 Kings 6:14) or the heaviness of sin (Isaiah 1:4). It thus can also refer to someone's reputation in community

(Proverbs 15:33). Not unrelated, it can also mean the same thing as "soul" or "self" – as in the King James version of Psalm 16:9.

Some of these nuances are applicable to the "glory" of God: it includes His "reputation" (Deut. 28:58), and the "outshining" or halo-effect of His presence (Ezekiel 10:4). But it also refers to His very self (Psalm 26:8). When Isaiah prophesies that "the glory of the Lord will be revealed," he is preaching the most rewarding message that Israel could possibly hear. The hidden and elusive God will take up full and open residence among His people, resulting in an astonishing relationship of satisfying activity and transcendent joy. In His glory He will comfort, and to be comforted by Him will be glorious.

The NT knows that the ministry of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit, is all the direct fulfillment of these promises. For instance, read Ephesians 1:3-14, a powerful celebration of the comfort God brings in salvation. And note the references to God's glory in verses 6, 12, and 14: the whole astonishing story and reality is anchored firmly in God's own grace, so that we live "to the praise of His glory." We know more details, and have experienced deeper grace, than did Isaiah; but with Paul we can find no higher calling. We live for "the One who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6)

RESPOND

Psalm 128 tells of the everyday blessings of the one who lives true to the knowledge of God. As a teacher I can wax pretty exalted about God's glory; but the psalmist reminds us that it is just as much a matter of "walking in His ways," and securing the domestic joys of a happy family. Who was it that said, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth"? They knew whereof they sang.

PRAY

Lord, Thank you for the glimpses of Your glory in forgiveness, in fellowship with others, in work that is rewarding, in opportunities to share Your love with others.

- D.D.

READ

Isaiah 62:1-9

Psalm 129

REFLECT

Toward the end of his book, Isaiah takes up a new theme, or at least develops it in a deeper way. The redeemed and restored community is not only to be comforted, but it is also to be a great place to live. If most of his prophecies are enunciated “for the Lord,” this one is proclaimed “for Zion’s sake.” “Zion” is the name for the hill upon which David built the Temple, and in his time the city of Jerusalem was confined to its slopes. So “Zion” became a name that stood for Jerusalem and Judah in an idealized sense, a pointer to what they ought to be and what they could become.

Isaiah, then, articulates God’s will for the nation as a whole, the things that He will do “for Zion’s sake,” so that Jerusalem will be properly “established.” (62:7) These include a long-term stability, respect and even admiration from the surrounding nations (vv.1,2), and an ethos of beauty and dignity (v.3). And again the blessings that can be experienced in the choicest family moments become the paradigm for what it will be like to live in such a society (v.4,5). In the meantime the progress toward this goal is overseen and furthered by designated leaders, the “watchmen” of Jerusalem, whose work is to *remind God* to take no rest until He has brought these promises to fulfillment (vv.6-7).

If the fulfillment for Israel still awaits, there is much to hear in this passage about God’s care for the NT “People of God,” that is, the Church. It presents us not only with the promise of blessings, but with great responsibilities that come with them. We are blessed to be

adopted into the family of God, sons and daughters of the Most High. But this passage reminds us that the ethos of family life, which has special opportunity to be enjoyed to the full in the Church, requires careful and hard work. At a time when our society at large holds views of the Church that are neither beautiful nor righteous (for good reasons and bad), we are reminded that we do well to cultivate positive views of the Church where possible. And in a community like ours, where every member is a “full time minister” (as Pastor Mazzela so often reminded us), we are reminded of our unceasing responsibility of prayer and practical involvement in the establishment of Glenkirk’s life and ministry,

RESPOND

God cares about His people – how they relate together, and how they are perceived by others. He cares because only as we rise to the occasion of His grace in these matters do we participate in His love. As we treat each other as we ought, and as we demonstrate to the world the transformations that God can bring, we function for the purpose He has called us: to the praise of His glory.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank You for the urgency of Isaiah, who “did not keep silent.” Thank You also for those in our own lives who walked with us the extra mile so that we would come to know Your love. Help us too to stay diligent in our response to Your grace, and active in the lives of others.

- D.D.

READ

Isaiah 9:1-7; 50:4-7; 53:3-6

Psalms 130

REFLECT

One of the reasons that Isaiah appeals so much to the Church is that many of its passages seem to relate so specifically to the mission and life of Jesus Christ. In fact there seem to be prophecies in Isaiah that could only be fulfilled by Jesus.

One of these is the passage from chapter 9. The “people who live in darkness” in Zebulun and Naphthali, in the north of Israel, in Galilee, will “see a great light”; it is clear to Matthew that this foretold the preaching of Jesus (Matthew 4:15-16). The joy of the oppressed will be restored especially with the coming of a new leader: “For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given.” The message of the angel in Luke almost seems to cite it: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior...” When the passage in Isaiah reaches the words “And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor; Mighty God;...” then surely the confidence of generations of Christian preachers is clearly understood, that this could only describe the incarnate God.

The other two of today’s passages are two of what are referred to as the four “Servant Songs” of Isaiah 40-55 (the others are 42:1-4 and 49:1-6; the fourth runs from 52:13 to 53:12). There is some discussion about how these are to be read in the context of Isaiah. They depict a beautiful and obedient spirituality, but is it meant to be Israel? – or an obedient group or “remnant” within Israel? or a leader to come? Their enigmatic nature makes it all the more poignant for Christians who find the spirituality and obedience of Christ to be so readily represented. The

passage from chapter 50 seems to probe the very heart of Jesus in His day-to-day obedience before the Father, as well as His special courage in the hour of His trial. The Isaianic themes of knowledge, disclosure, obedience, and witness are wedded in a spiritually attractive portrait.

The passage from Isaiah 53 may be in many ways the most convincing prophecy of all, for Christians. Especially the end of v. 6 – “Surely the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon Him” – could be a comment written after the fact of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. There could surely be no clearer description of a human sacrifice for sin, although human sacrifice was abhorrent to the religion of Israel. These verses have never figured in the messianic expectation of Israel; it took the life of Jesus for us even to recognize it as a prophecy of the Christ. The mystery remains two-fold: how searching was Isaiah’s prophecy, and how profound was Jesus’ fulfillment of it.

RESPOND

Psalms 130 is an eloquent prayer for the help of God in crisis. The heart of it is the assurance that “there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou may be feared.” The lengths to which God would go to procure and to assure forgiveness were only glimpsed in the OT. Now the opportunity is here – for forgiveness, for joy, for witness, for meaningful service. Why would we delay?

PRAY

Dear Lord, Help make these words more and more true of us: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a disciple, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens me morning by morning; He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple” (Isaiah 50:4).

- Dave Dorman